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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON MIDDLE EAST

Summary

-- Lead story in all papers today, June 30, is the visit to the region of U.S. National Security Advisor Rice. Reports also highlight the agreed "truce" of Palestinian militant groups and the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. Papers also highlight a "new American military offensive" against continued "resistance" in Iraq.

Editorial Commentary

-- "Condoleezza Rice: she might succeed where men have failed"

Daily columnist Sultan Hattab writes on the op-ed page of semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (06/30): "By signing a joint document declaring the truce and handing it to the Palestinian government, the Palestinian factions have taken a correct step towards supporting Palestinian legitimacy. They have provided this government with an opportunity to present the Palestinian cause once more in a light that would win the world's understanding for the urgency of finding a political solution that would enable the Palestinian people to restore their rights and establish their state. This agreement saves Abu Mazen's government, first and foremost, but also protects the Palestinian factions, whom Israel wants to see disagree so that it can pursue them and kill their leaders.. The United States seems now to be more interested in the roadmap, in removing all obstacles that stand in its way, particularly Israeli obstacles, and in implementing the agreement with equality and balance. This is clear from Ms. Rice's visit to the region and her successful meeting with Mahmoud Abbas."

-- "Washington's objection to building the dividing wall: the beginning of a practical stand"

Semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (06/30) editorializes: "Reports leaked by the Israeli media about the heated discussion between Advisor Condoleezza Rice and the Sharon government show a relatively more understanding American position towards the nature of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.. Washington's stand now indicates America's seriousness to handle the conflict in accordance with the roadmap, which seems to be the final opportunity to salvage the peace process."

GNEHM